Legal Services Corporation
Office of Program Performance

Guide for Evaluations Using the State Justice Communities Planning Initiative Evaluation Instrument

July 2003

Purpose Of This Guide

This guide is designed to offer direction for the states preparing for LSC evaluations employing the *State Justice Communities Planning Initiative Evaluation Instrument.* It indicates what they need to provide to the LSC and what arrangements they need to make for the site visit itself. It also describes for the LSC staff and evaluation team members what steps they need to take to assist state to prepare. It details the process the evaluation teams will follow in conducting the site visit, gathering information, scoring the instrument, and providing input to the state and to the LSC.

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Basic Components Of The Evaluation Process

Evaluations will be based on the *LSC State Justice Communities Planning Initiative Evaluation Instrument.*

States to be evaluated will be given at least three months' notice of the dates of the formal evaluation. LSC will attempt to coordinate the dates for an evaluation with the state so as to avoid time periods that would pose an unusual hardship on a state.

Approximately two weeks after a state is notified of an evaluation, an LSC staff person will confer by teleconference with leaders of the state's legal services community in a pre-evaluation coordination session to review the Evaluation Instrument and this Guide, to reach detailed understandings of the roles of the LSC, the state, and the evaluation team, and to agree on additional steps needed to prepare for the evaluation and a timetable for their completion.

Evaluation site visits will ordinarily be conducted by a team of four persons over a one week time period. The size of the team and the length of the site visit may vary with the size and complexity of the state being evaluated; they may be smaller and shorter or larger and longer, as circumstances warrant. If the evaluation team concludes that the state's planning process is not "adequate" as that term is used in the evaluation instrument, no site visit will be conducted. The state will be scored without a site visit and the score will be a 2 or lower on *Part 1* of the instrument.

States will provide information about their planning processes as set forth in this guide [1] and as agreed during the pre-evaluation coordination session, at least 45 days prior to the site visit. Materials may be provided in either electronic or written form, or in some combination of the two. The LSC principal contact will be responsible for disseminating current and earlier versions of the state's plan to the team members at least 45 days prior to the site visit.

Evaluation team members will score *Part 1* of the Evaluation Instrument individually – based exclusively on the current and prior state plans -- no later than one month prior to the site visit and provide the LSC principal contact with a list of issues raised for them in the course of their review and scoring of the state plan and an assessment whether the state's plan is at least "adequate." These scores will be tentative, subject to revision based on additional information developed in the course of the evaluation site visit.

Principal contacts for the state and for LSC will agree upon a list of interviewees, necessary travel, and a schedule for the site visit.

Some interviews will be conducted by telephone, because of the location of the interviewee, the interviewee's schedule, or the time schedule of the evaluation team. Evaluation team members will conduct as many of these telephone interviews as possible before they arrive on site.

Evaluation team members will conduct interviews, view demonstrations and otherwise verify and supplement the information provided by the state about its planning process. The team will then complete the evaluation instrument – both scores and comments – both individually and as a team. It will develop feedback to deliver to the state at the end of the visit; and thereafter, a final version of the completed evaluation instrument for consideration by LSC and by the state evaluated.

The team will assemble the afternoon before the site visit begins to review the elements of the workplan developed for that state, including: (1) the materials received, the schedule for the week, individual team member assignments with particular interviewees, and the issues of concern to be raised with interviewees; and, (2) to clarify any issues individual team members may have about the evaluation process or the Evaluation Instrument itself. The team must be certain that the interviewees selected possess an appropriate level of knowledge to address the questions presented.

[1] See, page 6, below "Responsibilities of State for Providing Information."

Team members will meet and confer at the end of each day, sharing the information they obtained during the day and discussing their observations and impressions.

The team will reserve a half day for individual scoring and a full day for team consensus scoring. Scoring will be completed before the team leaves the evaluation site, and before the team discusses the general themes to stress during the exit conference with the state's legal services leadership.

The LSC principal contact will take the lead on verifying and distributing data on the measures from Section 3 of the questionnaire. Every team member will have that data – to the extent it is available from the state - in hand before completing the instrument.

The site visit will end with an exit conference with the state's legal services leadership cadre, including if possible, all LSC program directors.

The LSC principal contact will be responsible for preparing the team's evaluation report– including the narrative which is set forth in the comments -- during the four weeks following the site visit. All team members will review and approve the final report.

The state will have an opportunity to comment on, and to request reconsideration of, all aspects of the final report. LSC will decide, in consultation with the evaluation team, whether to accede to those comments and requests.

Key roles

LSC will designate a staff member who will serve as LSC's "principal contact" for the evaluation of a state. That staff member will be responsible for LSC preparation for the evaluation, for working with other LSC staff as needed, for coordinating advance interview scheduling with the state to be evaluated, for coordinating travel plans with the members of the evaluation team, for maintaining a log of all written materials collected in the course of the evaluation (including completed interview protocols), for preparing the final report, and for maintaining all records pertaining to the evaluation. The LSC principal contact is also the team leader for the state evaluation visit. The LSC principal contact *is not* LSC's state planner for that state.

LSC will name the members of the evaluation team. The LSC principal contact will provide all team members with a list of the planning documents to be considered in the evaluation process and their website locations (or with copies if they are not available on the internet).

After developing a state evaluation workplan,[2] the LSC Principal Contact will confer with the team by email or conference call and identify any areas of particular interest and concern that might influence the interview schedule.

The LSC principal contact will also coordinate all logistical arrangements for the site visit, with assistance from the state principal contact.

The state to be evaluated will designate a state "principal contact" for the evaluation. The state's principal contact will be responsible for assembling (or causing others to assemble) the information needed for the evaluation and for scheduling interviews for the evaluation team in coordination with the LSC principal contact. The state principal contact will be available to the team during the entire period of the site visit to provide additional information requested, to answer questions, and to attempt to schedule additional interviews deemed important to the evaluation team.

Responsibilities of LSC staff

1. Completion of *Part 2* "actions items"[3]

In preparing for a site visit, the LSC principal contact will review all versions of the state plans submitted by that state. S/he will prepare a list of all of the actions contemplated in the most recent version of the plan and additional significant actions contained in earlier versions of the plan. The list will be in the form of a table with spaces for team members to record their implementation scores and comments for each action (See *Part 2* of the instrument). S/he will forward that section of the instrument to the state principal contact, who will review it, add any additional actions on which the state wishes to have its plan implementation evaluated, and return it to the LSC principal contact. LSC principal contact will act for LSC in agreeing to or rejecting the additions. The LSC principal contact will ensure that evaluation team members receive the revised list of *Part 2* action items at least a month prior to the site visit.

2. Coordination of interview and observation schedule

The LSC principal contact will act on behalf of the evaluation team in working with the state principal contact to develop a satisfactory list of persons to be interviewed, planned observations or demonstrations, and an interview schedule. S/he will confer with the full

[2] The "workplan" should incorporate (1) the timetable for making logistical arrangements, (2) areas of focus or emphasis to be further investigated during the evaluation, as determined by a review of the state plan and other documents provided by the state; (3) a list of documents requested from the state; (4) a list of interviewees, targeted with special personal or representative knowledge; (5) background research about the state, including legal service program providers; and, (6) census data and other empirical information.

[3] An "action item" is a contemplated accomplishment articulated by the state in its current and/or prior state plan or any other recognized achievements implemented as a result of state planning.

team by email or telephone to identify which issues and implementation actions the team wishes to discuss with someone during the site visit. The LSC principal contact will convey these topics to the state principal contact well in advance of the site visit.

3. Decisions concerning size of the evaluation team, the length of the site visit, and travel to be conducted by team members during the site visit.

Early in the planning process, the LSC principal contact, after consultation with the state principal contact, will decide how many persons will participate in the site visit and how long the visit will last. The LSC principal contact will also decide how much in-state travel will be included within the site visit schedule. Considerations in making these decisions include:

- Members of the evaluation team will travel within a state during the site visit only when strategically necessary. Travel will not be presumed to be a part of every state's evaluation. Travel will, however, be conducted when necessary to achieve some objective of the evaluation process, such as:

- travel to view a demonstration of a program unique to a particular geographical area;

- travel to rural areas of a state with a mixture of rural and urban programs;
- travel to other urban areas when a state has competing centers of urban influence;

- travel to a state with markedly different geographic areas to appreciate concerns about geographic diversity;

- travel to visit individuals who have played an importance role in development of the state's legal services program;

- travel to address other issues of respect and courtesy, or to ensure the credibility of the evaluation.

Responsibilities Of State For Providing Information

Prior to the team's arrival for the evaluation visit, the state principal contact will be responsible for identifying individuals within the state who will be able to address the issues and implementation actions conveyed to him or her by the LSC principal contact and will assist in constructing the interview schedule by making recommendations of such individuals to the LSC principal contact. The schedule will provide interviews for the number of persons on the evaluation team, but will not assign particular interview schedules to individual team members; the team will make those assignments before the site visit begins.

In assembling information for the evaluation team, the state principal contact should assemble the information in the easiest, cheapest fashion possible, using existing documents and avoiding the creation of new documents to the extent possible. The information should be presented in the order requested, but need not be tabbed, indexed or otherwise identified. When information is not available, the state principal contact should provide a one paragraph statement to that effect and insert it in the materials at the appropriate place.

General questions about the information to be provided will be discussed during the pre-evaluation coordination session. The state principal contact should feel free to contact the LSC principal contact at any time s/he is unclear what information is required.

If any topic in Sections 1 and 2 of *Part 1* of the evaluation instrument is already addressed satisfactorily in the state planning documents, the state need provide no further information.

The state principal contact will assemble and provide the following information:

Part 1, Section 1

1. A short narrative addressing items 1-1.1.1 through 1-1.1.10. The narrative should be descriptive rather than conclusory, but should be brief – paragraphs rather than pages.

2. A list of the members of the state planning board showing the groups or organizations they represent and their own personal characteristics, if known, relevant to the diversity of the board. This information may be combined or submitted separately. A person may "represent" a group by being a member of the group, whether or not he or she is formally authorized by the group to represent it. A person may represent more than one group.

3. The state planning board's vision (if it is not in the plan), together with a statement of how it has been made known to the legal services community.

Part 1, Section 2

4. If it is not in the plan, a list of the sources from which input was obtained for the most recent state plan with one sentence or phrase describing how the information was obtained. The evaluation team may wish to view the input data obtained during the site visit.

5. No submission on Section 1-2.2 is needed. This should be evident from the plan itself. A state may submit a statement showing what data was used, if it believes that the description in the plan is insufficient.

6. If it is not in the plan, an example of the process used to track or monitor plan implementation. If the state does not use a document for monitoring plan

implementation, provide a few paragraphs describing the state's follow up process.

7. If it is not in the plan, a paragraph describing the state's plan revision and updating processes.

Part 1, Section 3

8. No submission is required for Section 3. The plan will speak for itself. The state may provide information on any additional activities resulting from the statewide planning process that have not yet be included in the state plan. The evaluation team will verify such supplemental actions through interviews or observations during the site visit.

Part1, Section 4

9. No submission is required for Section 4. The plan will speak for itself. Any supplementation will be obtained through interviews during the site visit.

Part 2

10. A brief description of the state's progress in implementing the actions identified for *Part 2*. The state may use the comment field in the list prepared by the LSC principal contact to provide this input. The state may wish to identify barriers encountered and efforts taken for some or all of the actions. A simple phrase – completed, fall 2001 - will suffice. No more than three paragraphs should be needed to describe the progress on even the most complex actions.

11. Evaluation team members will supplement their understanding of implementation issues during their interviews.

Part 3

12. The data specified for each of the eight measures. If the data is not available, so indicate. Contact the LSC principal contact to resolve any questions concerning the interpretation of the data requirements for the eight measures.

Responsibilities Of The State For Arranging Interviews And Demonstrations

The state principal contact should arrange the following:

A suggested interview schedule that puts the evaluation team in contact with key persons within the state, including every LSC-funded legal services program director. The list should include a person to address every issue or implementation action identified by the LSC principal contact. Interviews should be held at a legal services facility, a state bar headquarters, a court, or some other state or local justice facility, rather than in the team hotel.

Visits to significant state legal services projects resulting from the state planning effort.

The schedule should assume that each member of the evaluation team is available to conduct interviews or visits independently; consequently, simultaneous interviews should be scheduled. Interviews should be scheduled for one hour, or a shorter time taking into account the need for the team member to travel to the next interview. More than one team member may participate in an interview. It may also be appropriate to interview more than one person at a time.

A few interview slots should be left on the afternoon of the third to last day for the scheduling of supplemental interviews identified by the team members during the site visit as useful or important.

Telephone interviews will suffice when travel or scheduling issues make a face-to-face meeting inconvenient.

When the LSC principal contact has agreed that a member or members of the evaluation team will travel to a different part of the state, the interview schedule should allow for travel time to and from such meetings so that both the interviews and the travel associated can be completed within the business day. When this is not possible, please extend the day in the morning rather than the evening, so that the evaluation team will be able to meet and confer at 7:30 pm each evening.

In arranging an interview schedule, meetings with diverse persons should be scheduled, including:

- Members of the state planning body (need not include all of them)
- Directors and board members of key legal services programs in the state, both LSC and non-LSC funded
- Funders of legal services within the state
- Justices, judges and court administrators who have taken an active interest in legal services for the poor
- Individuals who have been responsible for, or involved in, implementing significant actions called for in the plan
- Representatives of organizations with which legal services has engaged significantly as a result of the plan
- Representatives of state and local bars (e.g., presidents, executive directors)
- A few legal services lawyers
- A few legal services clients
- A few vocal critics of the state planning process, if any
- At least one law school representative

- Public officials who have taken an interest in legal services for the poor
- Representatives of civil rights groups, community organizations, or advocacy groups
- A few other community leaders, such as business or religious leaders

Inform the LSC principal contact of the names and relationship to the state planning process or representative status of persons who were contacted for interviews but were not available within the team's time schedule.

Conduct Of Interviews

Evaluation team members will use the interview protocol for all telephone and in-person interviews. They will ask the ten standard questions of all persons interviewed. They may pose supplemental questions of particular interest to the evaluation team arising from the interviewee's role, status or particular knowledge.

Scoring Of The Instrument

Each member of the team will score the instrument individually before beginning team scoring. The team will then meet, discuss their individual scores for each topic, and agree upon a consensus score for every item on the instrument.

Preparation of Summary Comments

After completion of scoring, the evaluation team will prepare a short summary presentation for the exit conference. The summary will not include any specific scores, but will summarize the principal strengths and weaknesses of the state's planning process and the team's primary recommendations.

Exit Conference

The state's leadership cadre will meet with the members of the evaluation team during the afternoon of the final day of the site visit. They will receive the summary report from the evaluation team and will have an opportunity to provide their reactions to the contents and recommendations of the report.

Final Report

The evaluation report will be provided in electronic and written form to the state for its review and comment. All comments and requests for reconsideration must be provided to the LSC principal contact within two weeks from receipt of the report. LSC, in consultation with the evaluation team, will decide which comments and requests to incorporate in the final report.